

## TESTIMONY CONCERNING SB 255

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee my name is Chuck Rein. I am a rancher from Big Timber. My wife and I also operate a small outfitting business based on our ranch. I am past co-chair of the Landowner - Sportsmen council under Governor Stephens and was chairman of the Montana Stockgrowers Association Landowner/Sportsmen/Wildlife Committee for several years.

I am old enough to remember when the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks commission set policy to manage game according to biological standards. Those days in agricultural circles we rarely talked about Commission decisions. The game was fairly well dispersed. Landowners and sportsmen alike were generally content with the numbers and quality of big-game. And access was not a major issue.

But over time personal bias and political agendas have begun to shape commission decisions. As a result we are faced with the most antagonistic landowner/sportsmen relations to date. Small business, especially in Eastern Montana is being negatively impacted. Why? Because commission decisions of late are allowing fewer hunters into areas already over objective for elk numbers. In short commission management decisions now focus on social objectives rather than biological objectives.

Allow me to give you one personal example. When I was younger there were no elk on the east side of the Crazy Mountains. In the early 70's elk were spotted occasionally. Around the turn of the century elk numbers were well past objective and still climbing. To help check this growth FWP initiated a late season cow elk hunt. It was successful in many ways. It provided opportunity for hunters, control of elk numbers for landowners, and good opportunity to foster and strengthen relations between landowner and sportsmen.

Then for no good reason the commission discontinued the late cow hunt. In my opinion the commission retaliated against me and others because we do not allow unrestricted public access. I did then and still do today provide season long access to one major drainage and access for cow elk the last 10 days of the season in another drainage. But apparently that is not enough. Without a late cow elk season hunters lose opportunity and elk numbers continue to grow. I do not see a winner in this situation.

SB 255 provides common sense sideboards to guide the current commission and future commissions as they carry out their call to manage Montanas wildlife. I thank you for your time and urge you to pass SB 255.